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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses and compares bidialectalism and various types of bilingualism, and the educational considerations presented by each. Stable bilingualism can result when each language is used by most, if not all, members of the community for different purposes. In a bilingual situation, societal factors are frequently such that no agreement can be reached as to the role each language should play. One language group may be materially wealthier and force members of the less-fortunate groups to abandon their language as well as their cultural values in order to share the wealth. Bidialectal individuals possess both a socially stigmatized and a prestige variety of the same language. Both bidialectalism and bilingualism as they are found in the United States are mainly of the transitional type. Both phenomena seem to be marked with some degree of strife or social tension. The resolution of the social imbalances accompanying both situations, however, will probably not be the same. (Author/VM)

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Bilingualism and Bidialectalism

Robert J. Di Pietro

One of man's most valuable possessions is his language. Through it he communicates with his fellow humans about affairs essential to his very being. Language is man's key to membership in his community. It is a tool which he continually adjusts to fit the tasks that challange him. Not only does language serve his utilitarian purposes, it also provides man with one of his greatest sources of pleasure. Granted that some men are more gifted than others in the use of language, all are capable of enjoying the artistic use of it in songs, novels, plays and poetry. The pleasure man derives from his language is evident even in early childhood. The very young can be observed to make sounds of all sorts and to lull themselves to sleep with the assurances of their own solliloquies. So much is language a part of our existence that to be deprived of it, ~~such~~ as in aphasia, is an affliction equal (to if not worse ~~to~~ than any physical confinement. Indeed, the very balance of our daily life depends on the availability of a language which we can use to interact with others in our community.

That balance is disturbed when groups of people find themselves in situations where recourse to a common language is either impossible or difficult. Since the structure of a community depends critically on communication,,the inaccessibility to some individuals of one of the codes of communication deprives them of community membership. When the number of such individuals grows

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sufficiently large, inter-group strife is likely to develop. The resultant imbalances must be resolved in some way. There are seemingly only two ways to achieve a new balance. Either the two groups restructure themselves and merge to form a new community or they take measures to reassert the distinctness of each of their original communities. If they decide to remain distinct, they need not move from the same or proximal geographical location and they may even learn to share some community functions in a kind of societal symbiosis. There are, in fact, many such situations in the world today. Many so-called "bilingual nations" are little more than different language communities located within the same political boundaries and forced to share some of the same national interests.

In those cases where genuinely bilingual communities arise, a relative stability of language use is achieved. That is to say, inter-group differences diminish and each language becomes associated with separate functions in the society. In this way, one language may develop as the tool for commercial transactions while the other takes over the role of instruction or religious training. In addition, a creolized variety may appear as the result of contact between the two original languages and come to be used in informal situations. It is not unusual to find each language involved in bilingual communities becoming associated with distinct levels of style all the way from informal, family discussions to highly formalized university lectures. Relatively stable

bilingual communities can be found in Paraguay[1], India[2] and in some parts of Africa[3], to name but a few. We can say, as a result, that the predominant feature of stable bilingualism is the use of each language by most if not all members of the community for different purposes. Separatism disappears and a social balance not unlike that of monolingual communities is achieved.

Unfortunately, bilingualism is not always stable. Oftentimes, societal factors are such that no agreement can be reached as to the roles each language should play. The differences between the social structures of the groups in contact may be so great that they can find little in common to share. One group may be materially wealthier and force members of the less fortunate groups to abandon their language as well as their cultural values in order to share the wealth. In addition to language and cultural prejudices, there may be racial ones which make integration as one community difficult. The result is that bilingual individuals develop only in those areas where the linguistically distinct groups must come into contact. These individuals find themselves playing the role of translators for their monolingual relatives and associates. Such has been the case with both the majority of immigrant groups in the United States and with the indigenous communities which have fallen in the path of our national expansion. Few or no positive values are left to the native languages of such groups once their members decide to climb to economically and socially advantageous positions controlled by the English-speaking majority. Despite

all efforts to keep a native language alive in the home, the pressures of English are usually so great that the socially mobile individual must eventually abandon it. Conversely, the monolingual speaker of English is not in the least constrained to abandon his language. Although we in the United States may express great interest in other languages, our record of achievement in learning foreign languages reveals the little practical value we see in them. As John Carroll[4] reported in 1967, the average language major near graduation in American colleges achieved nothing more than a "limited working proficiency" or a 2 / on the five-point rating scale of the U. S. State Department.

Our report card carries other bad marks. In the recent efforts of Spanish-speaking Texans to have school instruction in their native language, it came to light that the students were strictly forbidden to speak Spanish on school grounds under the threat of beatings and other sanctions.[5] One can only marvel that in spite of such pressures there are still millions of Americans who[50] native language is German, Italian, Spanish and Polish, and thousands of American Indians still speaking their tribal languages. Of course the price for this individualism has been high. The monolingual speaker of a language other than English is often trapped at the bottom of the economy. If he is rural, he finds himself lost in the city. If he is urban, he is deprived of joining in the mass exodus to the suburbs. Because his culture counts for little in the eyes of the majority, he is said to be culturally disadvantaged.

Even if he tries to find positive values in his restricted environment, the dominant culture destroys them by imposing its own set. Langston Hughes[6] sums it up eloquently with the following definition of misery: "Misery is when you heard on the radio that the neighborhood you live in is a slum but you always thought it was home".

Up to this point, I have discussed only the phenomenon of bilingualism and have said nothing about what has been called "bidialectalism". In accordance with the notion of "stigmatized speech", we can define bidialectal individuals as those who possess both a socially stigmatized and a prestige variety of the same language.[7] This definition hinges, of course, upon how well we clarify the notion of language. A variety of speech is recognized as a language for any number of different reasons. These include codification with a set of normative rules, association with a national state, a standardized writing system and a body of literature. Dialects may "grow" into languages through various combinations of such features. By calling speech varieties dialects, we imply that they are restricted geographically, socially or in both ways, while at the same time linked together in a chain of mutual intelligibility. To understand how some dialects become socially stigmatized, we must keep in mind that it is usually the higher social or economic class which stigmatizes the speech of inferior social classes. Thus, we speak about "ghetto" English but not about "suburban" English. The word "black" functions in social stigmatization while the word "white" does not. Ossie Davis[8], writing in the IRCD

Bulletin, reports that Roget's Thesaurus of the English Language lists 120 synonyms for the word "blackness", of which 60 are distinctly unfavorable and 20 are related directly to race. Slogans such as "black is beautiful" which are becoming more evident throughout our country represent an effort to remove some of the social stigma.

It appears that both bidialectalism and bilingualism as they are found in the United States are mainly of the transitional type. Both phenomena seem to be marked with some degree of strife or social tension. The resolution of the social imbalances accompanying both situations, however, will probably not be the same. If we succeed in deemphasizing racial distinctions as factors determining economic and social standing, the need to speak of "black" English will disappear. In fact, even today, the term "ghetto" English might be more appropriate in view of the growing numbers of black Americans who are mono-dialectal in a prestige form of English. The lack of attachment to "black" English by black Americans is clearly illustrated by the reaction of William Raspberry, a columnist for the Washington Post, to the work of Roger Shuy, Director of the Urban Language Study Program of the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington. Raspberry interpreted Shuy's proposal to use ghetto English as a base from which to teach black children as an attempt to "institutionalize the very inequities... that a democratic society and a democratic education should attempt to neutralize".[9] When Shuy denied any intention on his part to

raise the ghetto dialect to an "institutional" level, Raspberry responded that "some of the linguists, having discovered the consistencies and subtleties of ghetto language, may be overemphasizing the "where he (i.e., the ghetto child) is" at the expense of "where he needs to go".[10] How different this reaction is from that of many poor Spanish-speaking Texans who, while wanting to better themselves economically, have no desire to give up their way of talking for a prestige variety of English! At the very least, it is apparent that linguists working with socially stigmatized dialects will have to keep in mind that the subjects of their study are not in the enviable position of being detached from whatever labels are used, nor do they ascribe any socially positive values to their home speech. Furthermore, the teacher should be wary of claims that the methods of teaching foreign languages can be applied directly to the problem of imparting a prestige dialect of English to speakers of a socially stigmatized dialect. Much more research is needed, not only on social stratification, but also on the relevance of pattern practice, substitution drills and all of the other teaching devices to the acquisition of non-stigmatized dialects.

There are reasons to believe that the fate of Spanish-English bilingualism will be different from that of other combinations in the United States. Unlike German, Italian, Polish and other European languages in this country, Spanish profits from continuing socioeconomic support in the eyes of many Americans. The dominant English-speaking

community can look beyond the millions of poverty-stricken people who speak Spanish in the ghettos of our large cities and in the rural areas of the Southwest and reflect, instead, upon the potential of Spanish in foreign commerce and relations. Central and South America are vast markets for American goods and a man who is bilingual in Spanish and English can, if he is resourceful enough, put his language skills to good use in a business career. You may not agree with it but this argument is one that is likely to occur to those English-speaking Americans who insist that foreign language training be made "relevant".[11]

Awareness of an ethnicity extending beyond the physical limitations of their own poverty-stricken existence is only one of the elements that support the Hispano-American's positive attitudes about his language. A feeling of "having been there first" can be found among Spanish-speaking persons living in the southwestern part of our nation. As far as city living goes, the Spanish-speaking citizen can preserve his ties with a Puerto Rico which is Spanish-speaking, officially under the American flag and with Spanish as the predominant language of education. Since the speaker of Spanish in the United States need not suffer the "total break" with his home culture that characterizes the immigrant European, Spanish-English bilingualism is not likely to be as transitory as that involving other languages with English. Above all, it is not to be lumped together with a "bidialectalism" which contrasts prestigious with socially stigmatized varieties of the same language.

Having demonstrated that bilingualism and bidialectalism as found in the United States are more distinct than they are alike, we turn to the question of education. Although the actual procedures are far from perfected, the goals for educating the ghetto English speaker are more clearly in sight than they are for the bilingual child. Certainly, no one wishes to be educated in a socially stigmatized dialect. The decision that the curriculum should be programed to produce students educated in prestigious English is an important first step in interpreting the data gathered from the field worker in the ghetto. While great emphasis is presently being placed on the phonological and grammatical aspects of ghetto speech, I predict that attention will soon turn to experiential or semantic matters. I have reached this conclusion for several reasons. The world of a child is unique, regardless of where he lives. Each of his experiences helps him to build his own interpretations of the meaningful elements around him. While the child can be trained in many ways, he cannot be truly educated until the new things he learns can be related to what he has already experienced. In view of student unrest everywhere, our methods seem to have generally failed in this respect. The ghetto situation simply brings it into sharper focus. Because appropriate materials and techniques are absent, some teachers have turned to letting the students speak freely of their own experiences.[12] The results can be remarkable. The following poem is by Nell Moore, a 14-year-old ghetto child who finds the words to express the dispair of having

been neglected:[13]

WHO LOOKS

Beneath the sidewalks
to tunnels--
merging
separating--
searching out the
earthy blackness;
Behind the neons
proving
camouflage
for purple-veined faces;
Past the faces--
hiding
selves.

Although children like the writer of this poem have been called non-vocal, I suspect that their incommunicativeness results instead from not having been allowed to identify with the formal values of our school systems. Having the child discuss something that is real to him is not only a good way to start the educational process but is also a valuable source of information for the teacher. The insights obtainable about the child's experiences will help to shape the subject matter of the curriculum so that it effectively relates new concepts and experiences to the ones which the child

has already had. We must remember that the data compiled by linguists, psychologists and sociologists will not automatically apply themselves to the instruction of children from "disadvantaged" backgrounds. The teacher must bring his own professional skill and common sense to the task of translating field research into sound pedagogy. It may even turn out that a well-prepared curriculum aimed at ghetto children will be relevant to the "advantaged" child as well. Aside from the obvious need for phonological and grammatical drills addressed specifically to the ghetto child, the coverage of semantic and cultural elements could be broad enough to encorporate many experiential backgrounds. Just as the ghetto child needs to learn about the life patterns of others so should the advantaged child come to understand that his is not the only way of life. Perhaps the best text is the one that organizes information about all life styles found in the United States, therefore providing a broader basis for the tolerance of others.

Teaching in the bilingual situation is complicated by conditions not present in the case of bidialectalism. Because of the factors discussed earlier in this paper, one cannot always identify one language as socially stigmatized and the other as prestigious in the same way that dialects of the same language might be labeled. The result is a general disagreement about the accepted goals of education involving two languages. In a nutshell, one could say that "bilingual education" is not the same as "education of the bilingual".[14] The implication of the former is that the student

should emerge from school with an education acquired in more than one language. To attain this goal, decisions must be made regarding (1) which subjects are to be taught in which language, (2) should the same subject be taught in more than one language, (3) how should each language be taught as a subject in itself, (4) how does one test the progress of the child in each language, (5) what requirements should the teacher have, (6) how relevant will the overall education be to the student's needs, and many more such problems.

In the latter case, i.e., educating the bilingual, the authorities may conclude that an education in only one of the languages should be the desired goal. Without recommending that such programs are to be adopted, one can see that a decision of this sort simplifies the matter considerably. One of the languages comes to be marked as "subordinate" and is used only as the point of departure in order to build a competence in the other one. Both languages may be used as the medium of instruction, but the curriculum is phased so that "critical" subjects are taught only in the dominant language. Furthermore, the use of the dominant language becomes more frequent in the upper levels. Although contrastive studies might be made of the languages and cultures involved, only the dominant one serves as the "target" of instruction.

Whatever decision is reached about bilingualism in education, the pertinent societal factors must be considered carefully from many points of view. At the present stage, the only obvious thing is that one pattern of either bilingual education or of the education

of bilinguals is not possible for the entire nation. Each situation has its own combination of needs and natural resources so that procedures effective in one community might fail miserably in another. In this connection, I would like to leave you with one more thought. According to Joshua Fishman, a community that achieves a stage in which everyone can talk equally as well about everything in both languages will revert to a stage of monolingualism because no community needs two languages to discuss the same things.[15] If Fishman is correct, one had better demonstrate that each language in a bilingual situation serves a definite purpose--before embarking on a program of bilingual education.

I am sorry that I have no ready solutions to the problems of bilingual and bidialectal education. My remarks about the distinctions between bidialectalism and the various types of bilingualism are offered in the hope that they will help you decide what must be done in your particular case. The bilingual schools already in operation will have to be watched in order to see how successful they are in achieving the goals they set for themselves. Whatever decision is reached, a good start will have been made when children are no longer punished in school for speaking a language other than English.

Footnotes

[1]Rubin, Joan, National Bilingualism in Paraguay, The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1969.

[2]Gumperz, John J., "Communication in multilingual societies", in S. A. Tyler, ed., Cognitive Anthropology, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969, p. 435-449.

[3]Andrzejewski, B. W., "Speech and writing dichotomy as the pattern of multilingualism in the Somali Republic", The Symposium on Multilingualism, Brazzaville: The Scientific Council for Africa Pub. No. 87 (1962), p. 177-181.

[4]Carroll, John B., "Foreign language proficiency levels attained by language majors near graduation from college", FL Annals, vol. 1, no. 2 (Dec., 1967), p. 131-151.

[5]Aarons, Leroy F., "The Chicanos want in", The Washington Post, Wash., D. C., Jan. 11, 1970.

[6]Hughes, Langston, Black Misery, New York: Paul S. Eriksson, Inc., 1969.

[7]For a clear discussion of social stigma, see Goffman, Ervin, Stigma, Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964.

[8]Davis, Ossie, "The English language is my enemy", IRCD Bulletin, vol. V, no. 3 (Summer, 1969), p. 13-15.

[9]Raspberry, William, column in The Washington Post, Wash., D. C., Nov. 23, 1969.

[10]Ibid, Dec. 5, 1969.

[11]The "practical" value of Spanish may be the major factor in the rapid gains that Spanish enrollments have made in American colleges and universities. See Julia G. Kant, "Foreign language registrations in institutions of higher education, fall, 1968", FL Annals, vol. III, no. 2 (Dec., 1969), p. 247-304.

[12]Educationalists may see in this approach the implications of Montessori methods.

[13]From the collection entitled The me nobody knows, edited by Stephen M. Joseph, New York: Avon Books, 1969, p. 82.

[14]Gaarder, A. Bruce, "Organization of the bilingual school", Journal of Social Issues, vol. XXIII, no. 2 (April, 1967), p. 110-120. Gaarder characterizes bilingual schools as being either "one-way" or "two-way". In the former, one group of students is instructed in two languages. In the latter, there are two groups each studying in its own and in the other language. In both cases, instruction time may be either equally or unequally distributed between the two languages. Most bilingual schools do not give equal time and treatment to both languages. The Coral Way Elementary School (Miami, Florida) is given as an example of a two-way bilingual school in the United States. Wilson, Robert D., "Bilingual education for Navajo students", TESOL Quarterly, vol. III, no. 1 (March, 1969), p. 65-69, describes another two-way school which has been established for Navajo-speaking children.

[15]Fishman, Joshua A., "Sociological perspective on the study of bilingualism", Linguistics, 39 (May, 1968), p. 21-49.